Building a Watergate theory

New York News

WASHINGTON — The staff of the House impeachment inquiry is quietly developing a Watergate cover-up theory depicting President Nixon as having "no alternative" but to order the cover-up forward in order to conceal a series of other allegedly illegal and seemingly unrelated activities spanning the first four years of the Nixon presidency, the New York News learned yesterday.

Informed sources close to the House Judiciary Committee said that this legal theory will be at the heart of the staff's presentation when the committee completes its evidentiary hearings. As outlined by committee sources, the coverup theory — part of which is based on circumstantial evidence since Nixon has defied committee subpoenas for additional White House tapes and documents — centers on Nixon's alleged desire to buy the silence of Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt, the former CIA agent.

The fact that part of the staff's "case" against Nixon is circumstantial is expected to trigger strong opposition from Republican committee members, who have told the News that they fear they will be confronted in the coming weeks with a "fait accompli" on Nixon's alleged involvement and that the committee will vote on recommended impeachment articles without hearing from a series of witnesses who are likely to support the President.

Central to the impending partisan battle is the [illegible] among some Republicans that they will be asked to [illegible] supporting a recommendation for impeachment [illegible] partially on "ad[illegible]" and not on [illegible]. This [illegible] the current [illegible] (D-N.J.), that the committee will call only a few witnesses once all the impeachment evidence is presented.

According to sources, committee probers feel that Hunt's silence throughout the Watergate coverup was essential not just to mask White House involvement in Watergate, but to conceal other alleged crimes and activities which Hunt knew of or participated in.

It was Hunt, for example, who:

- Helped lead the 1971 breakin at the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, a raid whose discovery helped destroy the government's case against the admitted distributor of the Pentagon Papers.
- Secretly flew to Denver to confer with ITT lobbyist Dita Beard shortly before Mrs. Beard repudiated a memo she allegedly wrote linking an out-of-court settlement of a $1 billion anti-trust suit to ITT's pledge to help bankroll the 1972 Republican National Convention.
- Knew of alleged "national security" wiretaps on administration officials and newsmen ostensibly to plug leaks but which impeachment probers suspect may have been used to gather political intelligence as well.
- Forged State Department cables to link the late President Kennedy with the 1961 murder of South Vietnamese Premier Ngo Dinh Diem.

It was Hunt, noted one source, who threatened to blow the whistle on "seamy" activities if his money demands were not met. And when the pressure became greatest, sources said, it was Nixon himself who declared that paying Hunt was "the prime thing you damn well better get done."

"There was simply no alternative," said the source.

Nixon's order to pay Hunt, contained on the Mar. 21, 1973 White House tape, is among several personal actions by the President which the impeachment staff is investigating.

Said one source: "Whenever he (Nixon) was the only person who could do something, he did it."

Taken individually, one source said, Nixon's actions may seem unwise or improper, but not necessarily illegal or impeachable. But taken together, they allegedly create a pattern of action that the staff at least feels raises serious questions about Nixon's conduct in office.

1974 trial goal--Mansfield

United Press International

WASHINGTON — Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield said yesterday that if the House votes to impeach President Nixon, he will put the Senate on a six-day work week to insure completion of the trial before the end of the year.

"As far as I'm concerned, I want to see it completed this year, one way or the other," Mansfield said.

He said he would recommend the Senate work on a "six-day basis" to achieve that goal, although he stressed it was still uncertain whether the House would vote to impeach.

"I'll recommend that on certain days we have two sessions when we have issues of urgent and appropriate needs" such as appropriations bills, he said.

Mansfield said the Senate would "either recess or adjourn" from its trial prodedure and "then come back in session one or two hours later to take up bills that have to be considered."

He said he met with Nixon last Wednesday to discuss the President's upcoming Middle East trip, but Nixon "never mentioned" Watergate or impeachment.

Assistant Democratic leader Robert Byrd has raised the possibility of the Senate voting on impeachment next year in the new Congress.

Byrd has said that at the rate the House Judiciary Committee is moving on its inquiry into whether Nixon committed impeachable offenses, the Senate may not get the impeachment matter until September.

Mansfield conceded it was "a possibility" that the Senate could receive the articles of impeachment so late in the year that a vote would take place in 1975.

Transfers to consular posts

LOS ANGELES — Two officials of the Mexican consulate here have been reassigned in the wake of disclosures concerning an illegal ambulance-chasing ring.

Consul General Luis F. Orci confirmed this week he is being transferred to a post in El Paso and also confirmed the consulate's legal officer, Ricardo A. Silva, had been reassigned to head the passport section.